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Backstage at the CIA

From the start, it has been apparent to Washington's connoisseurs of political infighting that the hottest seat in the new Administration belonged to CIA chief Stansfield Turner, the career admiral summoned by Jimmy Carter in February to reshape and take control of the nation's diffuse, overlapping and gray-hemmed intelligence services. But even by Washington standards, the reaction to Turner has been cut-throat. Scores of highly placed spymasters—not merely CIA veterans but their counterparts in the Pentagon and elsewhere—have been unusually outspoken in denouncing the new chief as "a disaster," "Captain Queeg," "a man who thought he was God."

Terry Arthur

Turner: He was told to be bold—and he was

At the same time, the uppermost echelon of White House officialdom—tacitly including the President—has suavely combined to limit and redefine what the admiral thought had been an open-ended charter to preside over the entire intelligence apparatus. But through all of it, with no apparent sense of paradox, even Turner's fiercest detractors have been willing to admit that the quality of the nation's intelligence—the "product," as it is known to spooks—has continued to be first-rate, and may well go higher still.

The cause of the uproar seems to have been partly the job Turner was hired to do, partly the way he has gone about it. Humbled and somewhat demoralized though the CIA has been—by scattershot leadership (five directors and two acting directors within the past five years) and by post-Watergate revelations of drug experiments, dirty tricks and domestic spying—the agency's troubles still cover only one flank of the larger intelligence problem. Duplication is prodigal; each of the armed forces has had its own spook network aside from the CIA, as have the State and Defense departments. Coordination among them has been haphazard, accountability almost nonexistent. Most of these agencies, including the Pentagon's big National Security Agency, still excel primarily at the sort of military-hardware reporting appropriate to cold wars and big-power standoffs. They are less well equipped to provide the sensitive political, economic and psychological barometers that a more fluid world situation—and Jimmy Carter—have called for.

Lethal Chores: Turner was supposed to be something like an intelligence czar, overseeing everything from the Pentagon's NSA to the CIA in Langley, Va. But before he could deal with the grand design, he had to handle two lethally unpopular chores within the CIA. The first was to trim the top-heavy upper levels of the agency to make way for the promotion of younger men, and to cut back on the excessive manpower accumulated during the Vietnam era. Early last month, Turner assembled the agency's 500 ranking members and let them be the first to know that 820 operations personnel will be let go over the next 26 months.

Inevitably, the reaction was scalding. Aside from the shock of being let go, spooks tend to believe, however arguably, that they are unemployable in the outside world. There were muttered warnings that 800-odd ex-spies, adrift and jobless, would be a setup for enemy blandishments. Turner was denounced for his ignorance, his choice of aides, even his phraseology. He had used the phrase "lean and mean" to describe the CIA's shape of the future—an unfortunate echo of William Colby at the time of earlier wholesale firings four years ago.

Turner's second chore has been to take the heat for following Presidential and Congressional orders to increase CIA cooperation and coordination with other agencies of the intelligence "communi-

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ty." Turner was heavily criticized for stressing the community in his swearing-in remarks, rather than rallying the morale of his own troops. "Those were devastating signals to an outfit like the CIA," says one veteran. "The agency has never been enthralled with a director who's very interested in his community role. The CIA needs a lot of hand-holding." Not every agent is that dispassionate. "It all comes to a personal attitude," says one bitter spook. "Turner's has always been one of adversary relationships, blame, on people who have suffered enough."

In hindsight, Turner agrees that he might have done more at the outset for the CIA's *esprit de corps*. "There were problems when I arrived," Turner told NEWSWEEK, "and I think I compounded them because I did not come out here and say, 'I'm your leader and I'm behind you 100 per cent'." Still, Turner does not believe that he could give such assurances until he was sure that the abuses and improprieties of the past had indeed ended.

Wally McNamee—Newsweek

Brzezinski: Bruised toes

Overstimulated: Turner's problems topside, with his peers in the Administration, have been subtler and more private—but no less portentous. An abrasive, brilliant and by all accounts fiercely ambitious man (said to be the inspiration for Henry Kissinger's crack, "God spare me from intellectual admirals"), Turner charged into Washington with every apparent intention of running the nation's entire intelligence network. In this goal, he was perhaps overstimulated by his old Annapolis classmate Jimmy Carter, who had made known his desires for a streamlined and centralized intelligence operation. Carter told the admiral, according to the informed speculation of one Turner friend, "Go be bold."

"It was a very strong card," says one high Administration official—but Turner apparently overplayed it. He ruffled Zbigniew Brzezinski, the President's national-security adviser, by an inquisitive, unbidden appearance at Brzezinski's White House Situation Room one day. Brzezinski and Turner also differed over the informal sharing of intelligence by middle-level analysts in different agencies—a procedure that Brzezinski regards as fruitful "collegiality" and Turner looks upon as simple "leaks." On a somewhat loftier plane, several Administration honchos—Vice President Walter Mondale, budget director Bert Lance and energy chief James Schlesinger, himself a former head of the CIA—became concerned about the long-term dangers of concentrating power in one man's hands, which made them all the more sympathetic to the pleas of State, Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff that their agencies are better served by separate, specialized intelligence capabilities.

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Brown: A formula for compromise

In the end, the rumblings reached Carter, who "wanted effectiveness as well as reorganization," says one senior Administration hand. "He didn't want the feeling that somebody won, somebody lost." Accordingly, a list of options for intelligence reorganization was drawn up, including one that did consolidate intelligence agencies. Under this plan, Turner would have been made over-all director of intelligence, but line control of the CIA itself would have been given to another person. Faced with the loss of his troops at Langley, according to insiders, Turner came around quickly to support a formula devised by Defense Secretary Harold Brown and announced by Carter last month—in which Turner gets sole authority over budgets and assignments, but the separate departments retain line command for their own specialized agencies.

Accountability: The reorganization also establishes a "consumer's committee"—composed of Turner, the head of the National Security Council and the Secretaries of Defense, State and Treasury—that will be responsible, in theory at least, for the methods used in obtaining intelligence. In the past, the President took nominal responsibility for everything the spooks did. But in effect this was the same thing as no responsibility at all, since the first instinct of every bureaucrat is to "protect" the Chief Executive from anything that might embarrass him publicly. "Before, things happened, and nobody did it," Mondale said recently. "They would do these things and design them in such a way that it could not be traced to the President." Now the members of the consumer's committee will be accountable both for what they order and how the spooks get it. "It personalizes the responsibility so that they can't deny it," Mondale said. "What I think we've done is repeal the doctrine of plausible deniability."

With the worst of the infighting and bloodletting now presumably past, Turner is expected to proceed with the tricky task of reshaping U.S. intelligence capabilities. As one official explains, "We know a great deal about the Soviet strategic-weapons program, but we don't know *why* they're doing it." Similarly, the Administration knows how many nuclear facilities Germany plans to build and export, but not as much as it would like to about the interior pressures on German politicians to change direction one way or the other.

Red Faces: Despite Turner's troubles, the CIA is credited with performing well recently, though some faces are red over the agency's failure to detect a new South African missile-testing site in time to head off Russian yelps about an imminent atomic test (page 44). And the admiral has won high marks on another important front—from the Senate watchdog committee set up to write new intelligence guidelines to prevent a recurrence of past abuses. "I think we had to have somebody who would take charge and move very decisively," says Sen. Dee Huddleston of Kentucky, the guidelines sub-committee chairman. If some fair number of the spooks at Langley can be brought around to share this view, Stan Turner may yet prosper.

—RICHARD BOETH with EVERT CLARK and ELAINE SHANNON in Washington